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792 881 the monastery. It is a day of excited celebration. Recalling the Great Renunciation, when Gautama left the royal court in his quest for truth, the boy, attired in princely robes, is feasted by his family and friends until the moment when he casts his finery aside to don the yellow robe of the Order.[21]

[301] 562 881 779* 871 Girls experience a similar ceremonial initiation, when (to the accompaniment of vigorous music) their ears are pierced to take the ear-rings which are the sign of womanhood. They cannot attend the monastic schools with the boys, but other means are found for their education, and they certainly do not lag behind their brothers in intelligence, character or Buddhist zeal. Mrs Hla Oung recounts the story of a little maid taken to the monastery to be reminded of the five precepts, after some childish misdemeanour. (The monk was benign. "There was the faintest suspicion of a smile on his calm face, to show, I suppose, that her backsliding was not to be taken as a defection from the faith.") The 'charity of learning' seems, then, to be shared by girls as well as boys. The status, freedom and privileges of Burmese women have already been remarked and Mrs Hla Oung affirms vigorously that "the life of the Burmese woman is bound up in her religion. Buddhism has formed the character of the Burmese woman.... There are few Burmese women, even in the villages, who are unable to read and write," and the Buddhist scriptures form the ground work of their studies.[22]

792 871 178 Not only are the monks numerous, but they are dispersed throughout the country. Every village has at least one monastery, and sometimes more. The educational influence of the Order has been, therefore, both organised and ubiquitous. In more recent times this influence has been challenged by new conditions. Government and mission schools have intervened, and the modern Burmese boy may only remain in the monastery as a novice for a brief, token period. But during the centuries which shaped the Burmese character and outlook, the monks as educators had no serious rivals.

792 [157] 737 672 Nor has their ministry to the community been confined to education. Herbs and potions from the monastery are held in high esteem, especially in Upper Burma.[23] The monastery also serves as alms-house and asylum.

[21] For a good description of this ceremony v. Ananda Metteya, quoted by G. Appleton, *Buddhism in Burma*, pp. 22–23.

[22] Ma M. Hla Oung, "The Women of Burma," *Buddhism*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 61 (September, 1903, Rangoon); cf. a later series by Daw Mya Sein, "Kin Sein Hla," *Burma Today*, published by the Burma Government in India, 1944, in which the influence of the Monastery is not so strongly emphasised.

[23] "Theirs is faith cure rather than medicine," writes a Burmese correspondent, who cites cures from snake-bite, leprosy and hydrophobia.

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Old men will retire to the monastery to end their days there, and younger men, in poverty or other distress, will flee the world for a time. The hospitality of the monks has sometimes been more charitable than discriminate, a circumstances which has brought some monasteries into disrepute, for these temporary inhabitants are allowed to wear the yellow robe, and some are criminals, sheltering from justice. Father Sangermano reports the rescue of prisoners condemned to death. "In thus saving the lives of criminals, (the monks) believe that, as their law forbids them to kill, it must be meritorious to preserve the lives of others."[24]

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The monastery is the social centre of the village. Buddhism in Burma is gaily attired, a religion of festival. Frequently there will be an open-air performance in the moonlight, when a birth-story of the Buddha is dramatized. All this spirited, colourful life gathers around the monastery.

But perhaps the Order's most valuable service to the community is the function fulfilled by the monk as *counsellor*. A group of villagers may gather for a special instruction, others may attend when the monks assemble for devotions, but the monastery is not regarded as a preaching centre or as a place of public worship. In modern times, crowds have flocked to hear the Monyin Sayadaw. Generally, however, the approach in this respect is individual. It is as the individual adviser of each villager that the monk's influence is most strongly felt.

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In many and tangible ways, therefore, the monastery serves the community, but it is probable that the villager himself reveres the monk more for services which are intangible and may not appear so valuable to sceptical observers. Early in the morning, the monk, attended by *koyins*, will go the round of the faithful, receiving their offerings of rice in his begging bowl.[25] For the monk himself it is an exercise in humility, for the villager it is one of the chief means of increasing that *kutho* or worthiness which ensures him happiness in this life and the next.[26]

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Most of all, however, it is those very aspects of the monk's vocation which distinguish him from the rest of the community, setting him apart, for which the monk is chiefly esteemed. It is because the greater part of his life is spent in spiritual exercises which the villagers do *not* share, that they value him most. The monastery stands for a Way of utter renun-

[24] *The Burmese Empire*, 3d. Edition, ed. J. Jardine, (London, 1895), chap. xv, p. 122.

[25] Thus *bhikku or bhikṣu*, usually translated monk, means, literally, mendicant. Strictly speaking, a *bhikku* is not a monk; cf. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part II (S.B.B.), p. 81, footnote.

[26] *Kutho* is frequently translated 'merit.' But 'worthiness' is more accurate.